

Dear Editor,

The December 6, 2010 commentary, "Our friends in the desert" by David Keene, distorts the history and current realities of the Western Sahara conflict and misinforms your readers with wild allegations and hyperbolic claims that have been repeatedly rejected by most in the international community, including the US government, the United Nations, and key human rights organizations.

It is also important for your readers to know that, according to the US Department of Justice, Mr. Keene and his consulting firm received tens of thousands of dollars in lobbying fees from Algeria, the Polisario Front's ideological and financial supporter - a fact Mr. Keene fails to disclose.

Mr. Keene seriously misrepresents the position of the United Nations on the Western Sahara conflict. The UN Security Council has repeatedly called on Morocco and the Polisario Front to seek a mutually acceptable political solution to resolve the dispute. In 2007, Morocco responded with a compromise autonomy proposal which was deemed "serious and credible" by the UN Security Council, including the US, and many others in the international community. To date, the Polisario Front has rejected the call for compromise, stalling the UN-led negotiations process.

As well, Mr. Keene egregiously mischaracterizes the position of the US government in the Western Sahara conflict. The Clinton, Bush, and Obama Administrations, and bi-partisan majorities of the US House and Senate support a resolution of the conflict based on autonomy under Moroccan sovereignty. These facts are well documented, though Mr. Keene prefers to ignore them.

Furthermore, the author's description of life in the Polisario-run refugee camps in Algeria is the writer's fantasy. In the tightly-controlled camps—where the refugees are denied the most basic freedoms—there is only one permitted political party, the Polisario Front. Its appointed "president" for more than three decades hails from a dubious class of Cold War leaders including their continuing ally, Fidel Castro. In contrast, Sahrawis in the Moroccan-administered portion of the Western Sahara enjoy the full rights and protections of the Moroccan constitution—including landmark reforms that guarantee equal protection of women—and exercise their right to vote in internationally certified free and fair elections for local and national representatives in larger numbers than in anywhere else in Morocco.

Most regrettably, Mr. Keene's distortions dishonor the lives of the 11 Moroccan police officers savagely killed by violent, pro-Polisario militants who infiltrated what began as a peaceful social protest over economic issues near Laayoune. These police officers were armed only with non-lethal weapons—no "guns blazing," another of Mr. Keene's allegations that have been repeatedly denounced by the international human rights community. This includes the Polisario's other blatant attempts at propaganda by seeking to pass off as "Sahrawi" victims in the Spanish press photos of children in Gaza taken four years earlier.

For those who pay careful attention, the truth does eventually out such lies.

Sincerely,

Robert M. Holley

Executive Director of the Moroccan American Center for Policy (MACP)
MACP distributes this information on behalf of the Government of Morocco. Additional information is available at the Department of Justice in Washington, DC.

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Center for Policy

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Thursday, December 9, 2010

US Congressman Calls Morocco Key Counterterrorism "Ally;" Warns that a Polisario-led "Fake Microstate" in Western Sahara would create instability, export terrorism

Rep. Lincoln Diaz-Balart denounces recent "cynical attempts at purposeful disinformation" about Western Sahara on House floor

Washington, DC (Dec. 9, 2010)—On Tuesday, Rep. Lincoln Diaz-Balart (R-FL) called Morocco "our [US] ally in North Africa in the struggle against international terrorism" during a speech before the US House of Representatives. Diaz-Balart, who chairs the House's Morocco Caucus, reiterated the clear, longstanding US support for a compromise solution based on autonomy under Moroccan sovereignty in the Western Sahara and warned against certain "Castro-style repression" in a Polisario-led "fake microstate."

"The future of America's struggle against international terrorism and the stability of Northern Africa require that the Government and the Congress of the United States continue to stand firmly and clearly with our friend and ally, the Kingdom of Morocco," Rep. Diaz-Balart declared before the US House.

"The reality of Moroccan sovereignty over the Sahara enjoys the support of the entire population of Morocco, including the Sahara itself," Rep. Diaz-Balart reminded his colleagues. "For over a decade, Mr. Speaker, Morocco has agreed to grant a genuine and profound autonomy to the Sahara under Moroccan sovereignty in order to reach a realistic and definitive solution to this problem, but Algeria and the so-called Polisario continue to insist on the creation of a fake microstate. HM King Mohammed VI and his negotiating team have demonstrated great courage and patience in dealing with this critical issue so closely tied to the security of the entire region. Majorities in this Congress comprising both Republicans and Democrats have spoken clearly in support of our ally Morocco's position on this critical issue in letters we have sent, first to President Bush, and then to President Obama. The United States, during both administrations and with the strong leadership of Secretary of State Rice and Secretary of State Clinton, has agreed with the position expressed by the overwhelming majority of this Congress."

"Then, as now, the so-called Polisario group is financed by Algeria and is propped up by Castro's Communist dictatorship in Cuba," Diaz-Balart continued, "Let us never forget that such a microstate would serve as a focal point of regional instability and destabilization, as well as an exporter of terrorism."

For the full video of Rep. Diaz-Balart's statement, visit:

<http://www.c-spanvideo.org/videoLibrary/clic.php?appid=599253872>

Rep. Diaz-Balart also joined many in the international community by denouncing inaccurate, inflammatory media coverage of recent events in Laayoune (Western Sahara), in southern Morocco as "biased" and "cynical attempts at purposeful disinformation." Today, in letters appearing in *The Hill*, Robert M. Holley, Executive Director of the Moroccan American Center for Policy, and the American Council for Moroccan POWs also strongly criticized grossly distorted allegations run earlier by the publication.

"[D]istortions [which appeared in the publication] dishonor the lives of the 11 Moroccan police officers savagely killed by violent, pro-Polisario militants who infiltrated what began as a peaceful social protest over economic issues near Laayoune," wrote Mr. Holley in *The Hill*. "These police officers were armed only with non-lethal weapons [...] [these distorted] allegations have been repeatedly denounced by the international human rights community."

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I haven't spent as long in the National Archives as Professor Zunes, but in twenty years in the Foreign Service I've drafted and read as many cables. I also spent years in North Africa talking to Morocco and Polisario leaders for the US Government. Recently I've interviewed hundreds who've escaped the Polisario's authoritarian rule in refugee camps in Algeria. So, I can inject a few truths to Professor Zunes' tangle of ideological prejudice, conspiracy theories, disdain for American diplomats, and outright fabrication on the Western Sahara.

Morocco's autonomy proposal for Western Sahara under Moroccan sovereignty is fully within international law regarding recognized, acceptable forms of self-determination. It's backed by three US administrations (Clinton, Bush, and Obama), bipartisan majorities in Congress, and has broad international support. That isn't ideology, but a workable solution for resolving a 35-year-old crisis.

It's absurd to deny Algeria's role, as chief Polisario-backer, in perpetuating this conflict. The Polisario-run camps are in Algeria near Tindouf. Algeria has allowed the Polisario to confine Sahrawi refugees for decades, with no rights, jobs, prospects, or future. Thousands have voted with their feet—1,500 in 2010—making dangerous escapes to return to Morocco.

Rather than disparage the integrity of good people trying to advance America's interests abroad, Professor Zunes should reflect on questions of intellectual honesty studying difficult issues.

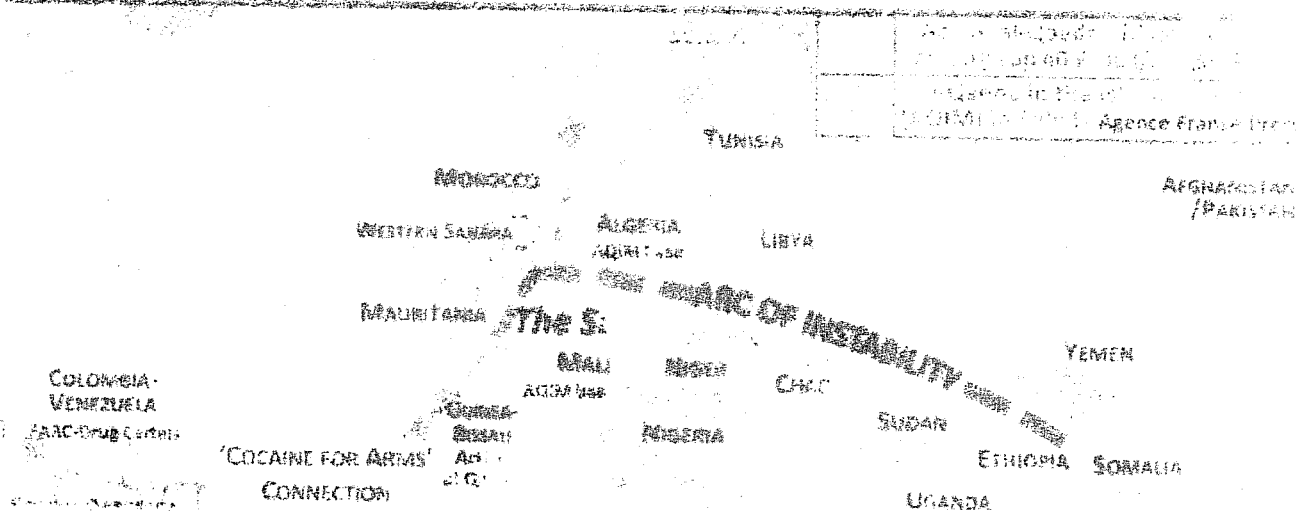
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Al-Qaeda casts shadow over North Africa and Sahel; Stalemate in Western Sahara creates opening for terror threat to grow

“This situation is becoming more dangerous, because of the violence and because al-Qaeda is now present”
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▶ **Al-Qaeda's regional affiliate, al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), has received extensive international news coverage this Fall as it emerged as a serious new transnational terrorist threat.** AQIM has established a safe haven base in the ungoverned border region of the Sahel—in southern Algeria, Mauritania, Mali, and Niger. Over the past year, AQIM staged a series of high-profile attacks, kidnappings of foreign nationals for hefty ransoms, a brutal beheading of a French hostage, and direct threats on European targets that has led France to declare AQIM its #1 security threat.

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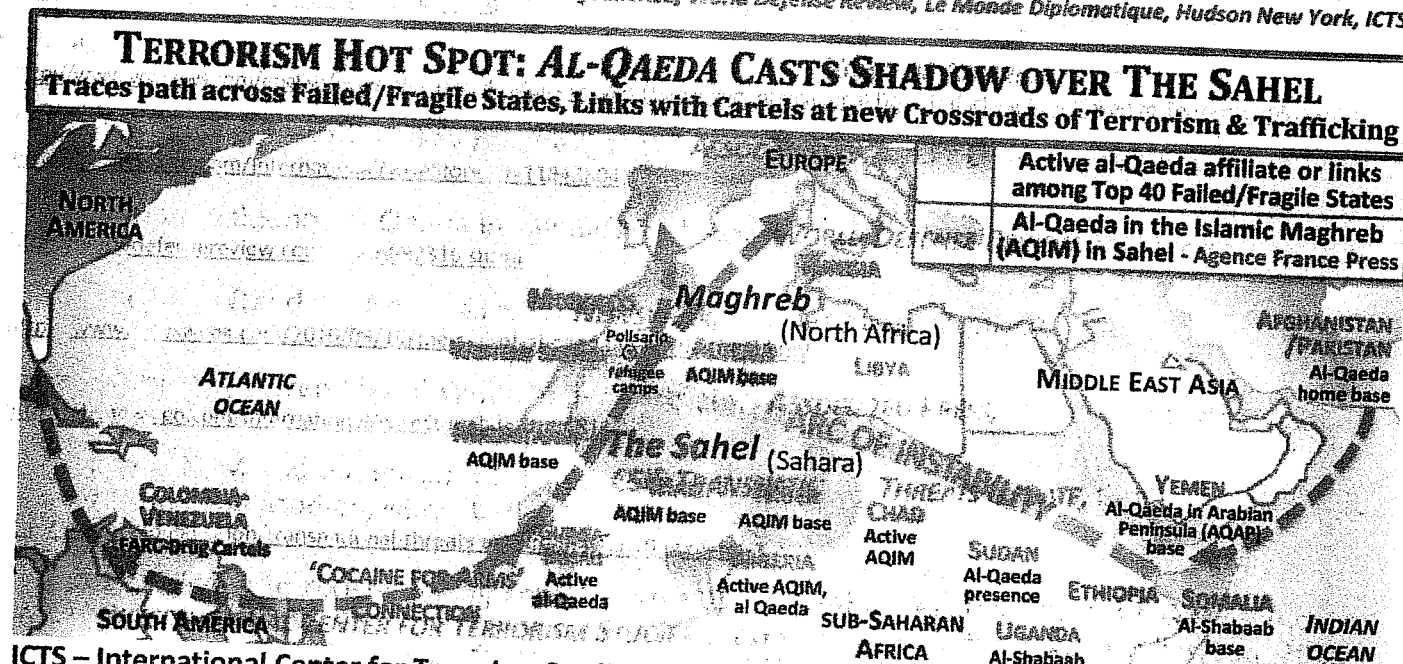
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ICTS – International Center for Terrorism Studies, at Potomac Institute for Policy Studies — Sept. 11, 2010

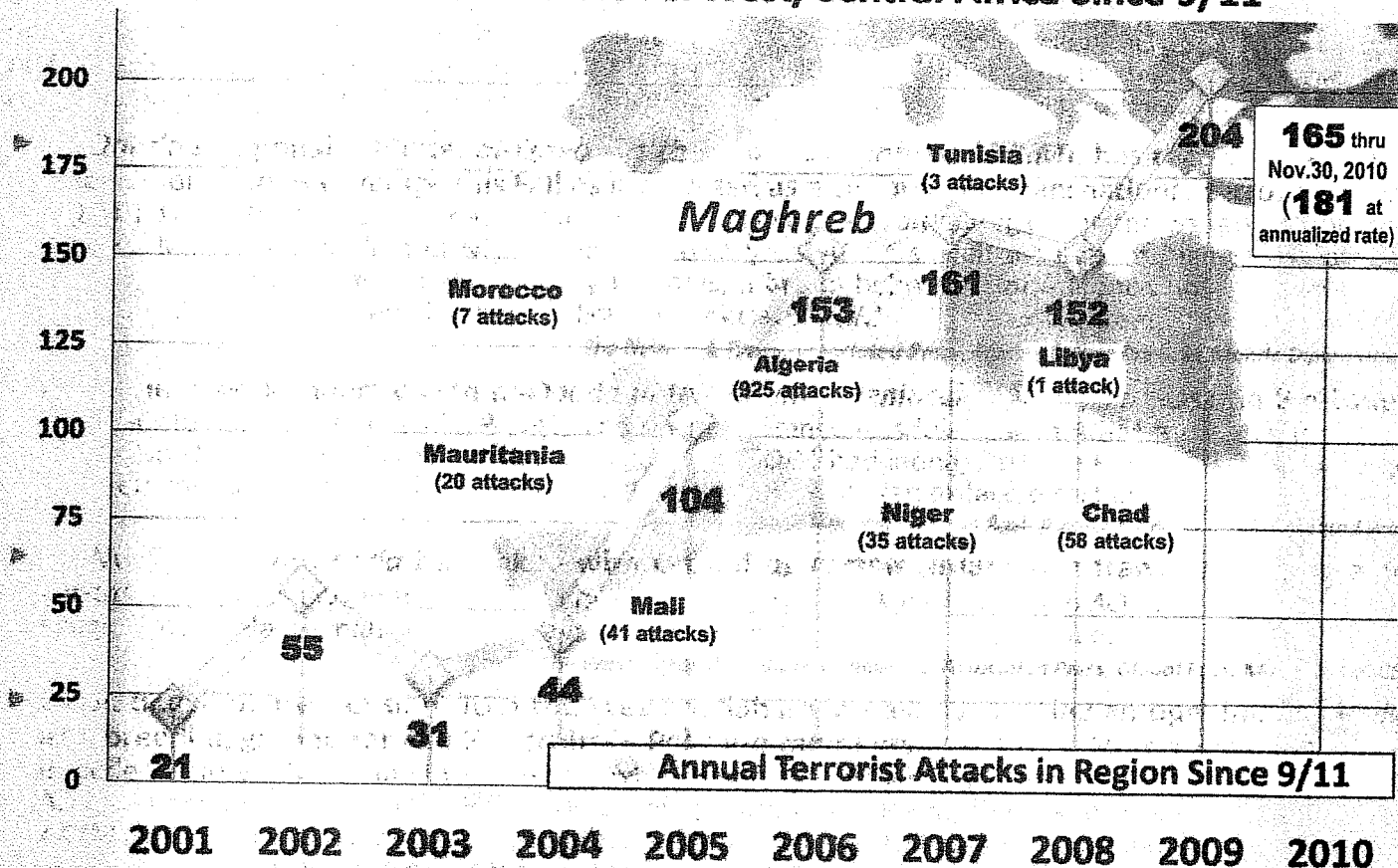
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- Maghreb & Sahel Terrorism: Rising Threat from al-Qaeda & other Terrorists in North & West/Central Africa
- ▶ **"Desert Land in Limbo Is Torn Apart,"** *NEW YORK TIMES*, Robert F. Worth, Souad Mekhennet, 12-9-10
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Maghreb & Sahel Terrorism: Addressing the Rising Threat from al-Qaeda & other Terrorists in North & West/Central Africa

YONAH ALEXANDER, INTERNATIONAL CENTER FOR TERRORISM STUDIES, POTOMAC INSTITUTE FOR POLICY STUDIES

Terrorist Attacks in North & West/Central Africa Since 9/11



Since Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks by al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and other militant extremists in the Maghreb and Sahel increased 558% from their low in the period to hit a new high of 204 attacks in 2009—and remain dangerously high in 2010. More than 1,000 terrorist bombings, murders, kidnappings, and ambushes—against international and domestic targets—claimed some 1,600 lives and 6,000 victims in Algeria, Chad, Libya, Mali, Mauritania, Morocco, Niger, and Tunisia. Links to organized crime are proliferating.

TIMELINE	YEAR	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010 (thru 11-30-10)
NORTH, WEST/CENTRAL AFRICA NATIONS	Totals 1090 attacks	21 attacks	55 attacks	31 attacks	44 attacks	104 attacks	153 attacks	161 attacks	152 attacks	204 attacks	165 attacks (181 annualized)
ALGERIA	925 attacks	20	54	28	39	93	120	110	121	185	155
CHAD	58 attacks				3	6	28	14	6		1
LIBYA	1 attack						1				
MALI	41 attacks			1	1	2	3	10	11	9	4
MAURITANIA	20 attacks				1	3		4	4	6	2
MOROCCO	7 attacks			2				5			
NIGER	35 attacks						1	18	9	4	3
TUNISIA	3 attacks	1	1						1		

*Data Sources: Worldwide Incidents Tracking System, Global Terrorism Database, Lawson Terrorism Information Center, and News Media. Updated Chart includes information on confirmed terrorist incidents from 2001-2010.

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NEWS BRIEFING:

Media reports & journal articles on key developments in Western Sahara—AUG-DEC 2010

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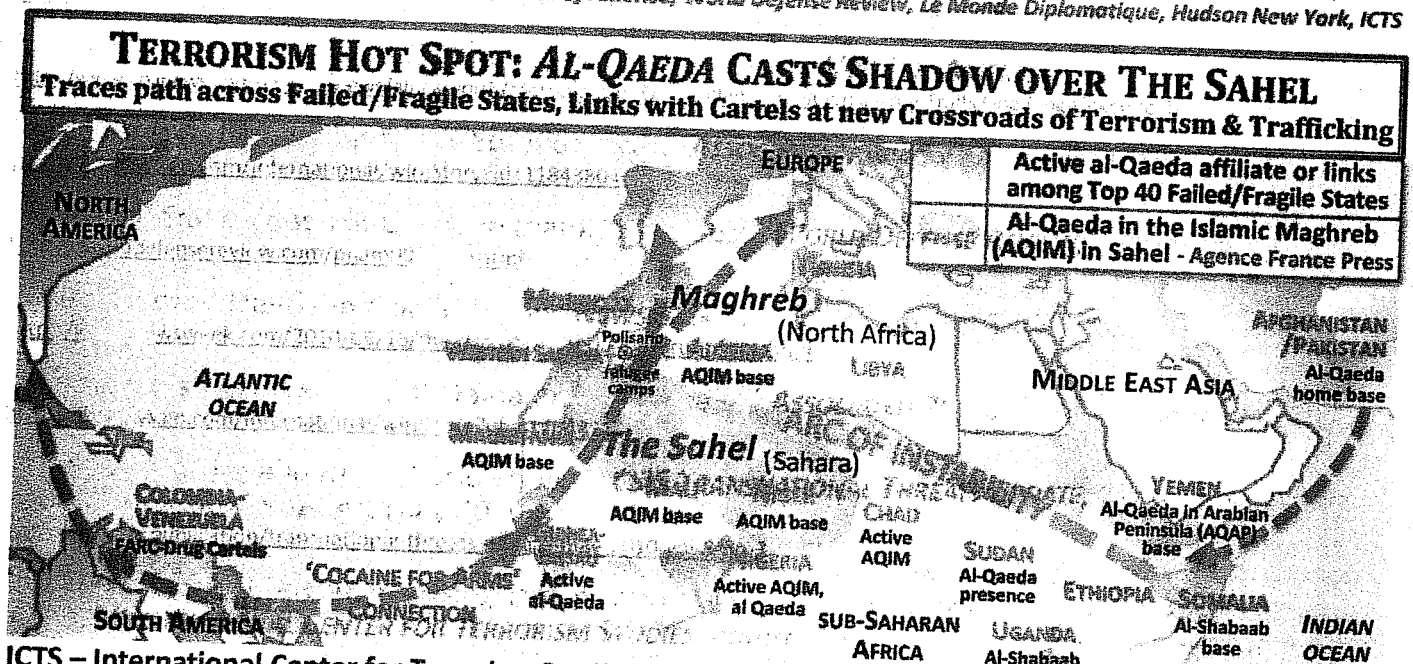
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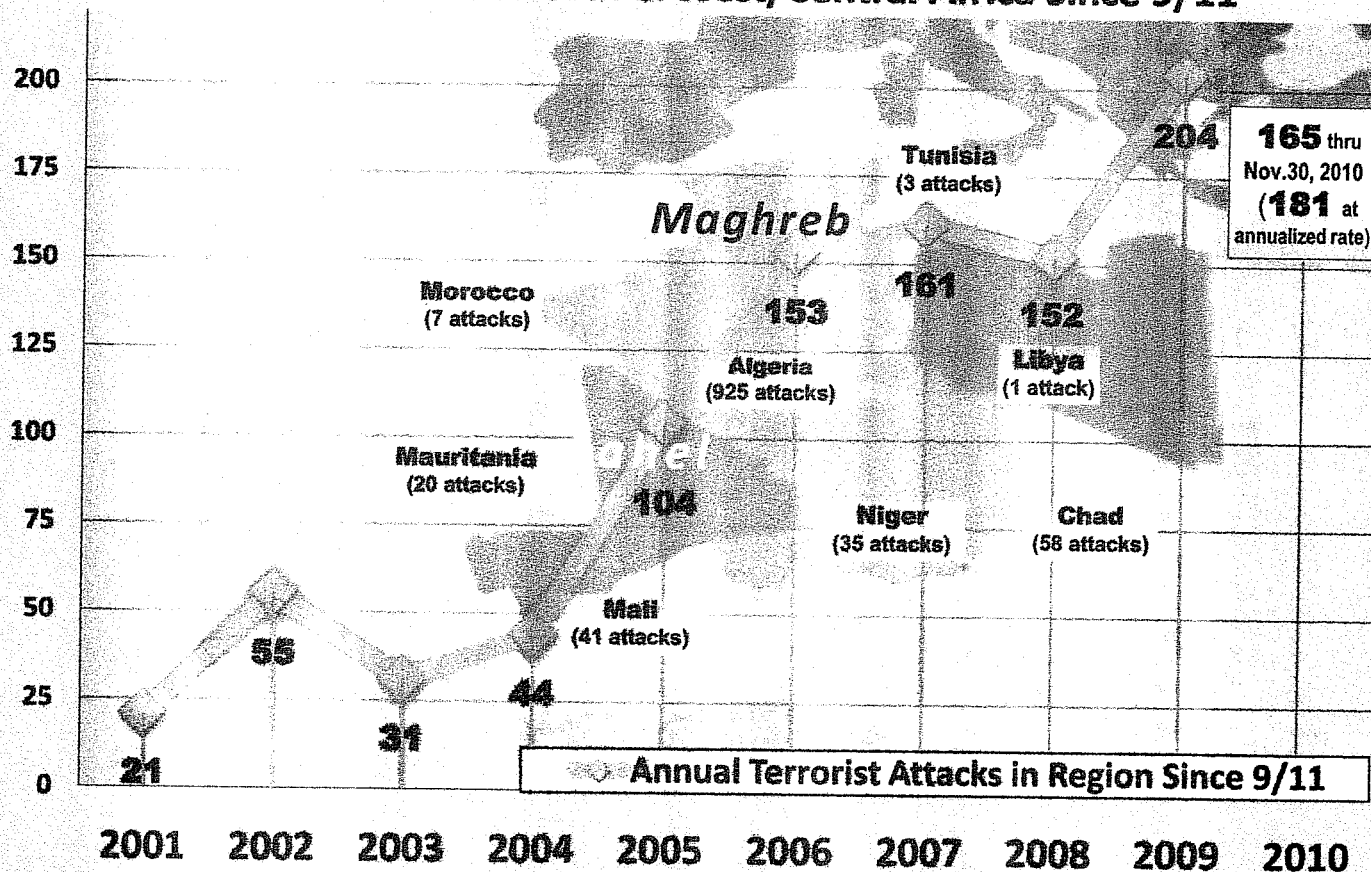
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Maghreb & Sahel Terrorism: Addressing the Rising Threat from al-Qaeda & other Terrorists in North & West/Central Africa

YONAH ALEXANDER, INTERNATIONAL CENTER FOR TERRORISM STUDIES, POTOMAC INSTITUTE FOR POLICY STUDIES

Terrorist Attacks in North & West/Central Africa Since 9/11



Since Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks by al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and other militant extremists in the Maghreb and Sahel increased 558% from their low in the period to hit a new high of 204 attacks in 2009—and remain dangerously high in 2010. More than 1,000 terrorist bombings, murders, kidnappings, and ambushes—against international and domestic targets—claimed some 1,600 lives and 6,000 victims in Algeria, Chad, Libya, Mali, Mauritania, Morocco, Niger, and Tunisia. Links to organized crime are proliferating.

TIMELINE	YEAR	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010 (thru 11-30-10)
NORTH, WEST/CENTRAL AFRICA TOTALS	Totals 1090 attacks	21 attacks	55 attacks	31 attacks	44 attacks	104 attacks	153 attacks	161 attacks	152 attacks	204 attacks	165 attacks (181 annualized)
ALGERIA	925 attacks	20	54	28	39	93	120	110	121	185	155
CHAD	58 attacks				3	6	28	14	6		1
LIBYA	1 attack						1				
MALI	41 attacks			1	1	2	3	10	11	9	4
MAURITANIA	20 attacks				1	3		4	4	6	2
MOROCCO	7 attacks			2				5			
NIGER	35 attacks						1	18	9	4	3
TUNISIA	3 attacks	1	1						1		

*Data Sources: Worldwide Incidents Tracking System, Global Terrorism Database, Lawson Terrorism Information Center, and News Media. Updated Chart includes information on confirmed terrorist incidents from 2001-2010.

This material is distributed by the Moroccan American Center for Policy on behalf of the Government of Morocco.
Additional information is available at the Department of Justice in Washington, DC.

The Honorable Hillary Rodham Clinton
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Clinton:

We are writing to urge you to make the resolution of the Western Sahara stalemate a U.S. foreign policy priority for North Africa.

We are very concerned about the mounting evidence of growing instability in North Africa. Terrorist activities are increasing and countries in the region are under substantial pressure from a growing and restless youth population and a precarious economic base. United States leadership in close cooperation with our allies in Europe and the region can help stabilize the situation and reverse these worrisome trends. We should begin with a more sustained American attention to one of the region's most pressing political issues, the Western Sahara.

Indeed, a report released on March 31, 2009 by a panel that included former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, former NATO Supreme Allied Commander General Wesley Clark, and former Ambassador Stuart Eizenstat, argued that "the U.S. must work diligently with its friends to resolve the stalemate over the Western Sahara."

We agree with you that the proposal introduced by Morocco in 2007 – based on broad autonomy for the Western Sahara under Moroccan sovereignty – is serious and credible. As you acknowledged in your remarks in Morocco last November, it has been the policy of the United States to support a resolution of this conflict based on this formula since the Administration of President Clinton. We support this bipartisan U.S. policy and the efforts of the United Nations to bring all parties together to resolve this matter peacefully at the negotiating table.

The challenges in North Africa for the United States and its allies are clear, and our leadership can make a significant difference for the better in promoting greater coordination to diminish and eliminate terrorist threats, in encouraging regional integration that will facilitate economic growth and prosperity, and in resolving the Western Sahara to remove the major obstacle to stability in the region.

We look forward to working with you towards the success of this policy.

Sincerely,

Diane Feinstein
United States Senate

Christopher Bond
United States Senate

The History of the Western Sahara

A Timeline

The sovereignty of the Western Sahara remains the subject of a dispute between Morocco and the Polisario Front, a separatist group based in southern Algeria. Morocco reasserted its sovereignty over the territory after Spain withdrew its colonial interests from the area in 1975. The Polisario Front has challenged Morocco's control over the Western Sahara.

The Moroccan Government has undertaken a sizable economic development program in the Western Sahara to provide economic, political and social infrastructure for the region's residents. Today, international efforts are underway to encourage a political settlement between Morocco, the Polisario Front, and Algeria that would resolve sovereignty over the Western Sahara through autonomy.

1578 to 1727 Moroccan Kings rule over the territory currently known as the Western Sahara

1884 Spanish colonization begins

1956 Morocco claims independence from France
Morocco reclaims the Western Sahara at the UN for the first time

1958 King Mohammed V formally lays claim to the Sahara

1963 The UN includes the Western Sahara on the list of non self-governing territories

1965 The UN General Assembly adopts its first resolution calling on Spain to decolonize the Sahara

1973 The Polisario Front is founded and stages its first attack

1974 Algeria begins to oppose Moroccan policy on the Sahara and trains Polisario guerrillas

1975 The Green March takes place in which 350,000 unarmed Moroccans march South into the desert to reassert the sovereignty of the Sahara from the Spanish

Morocco signs Madrid Agreement which seeks to transfer control of the Sahara to a three party administration divided between Morocco, Spain and Mauritania

Spain officially terminates its administration of the Sahara

1976 The Polisario declares the Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) and raises the flag of "Western Sahara"

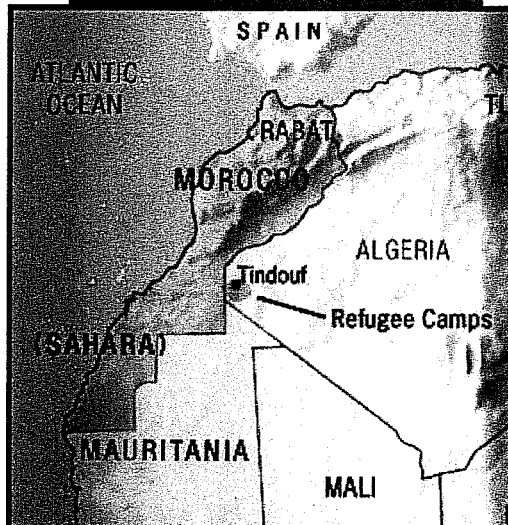
1977 Spanish-Moroccan fishing agreement is signed; the Polisario begins attacks on Spanish fishing vessels

1990 Morocco and the Polisario accept a UN peace plan, in which a referendum will be held.

1991 UN Security Council approves the establishment of Mission des Nations Unies pour l'Organisation d'un Référendum au Sahara (MINURSO)

"[Morocco's compromise autonomy initiative] originated in the Clinton Administration. It was reaffirmed in the Bush Administration and it remains the policy of the United States in the Obama Administration. [...] And I don't want anyone in the region or elsewhere to have any doubt about our policy, which remains the same."

-U.S. Sec. of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, November 3, 2009



"[T]he Kingdom [of Morocco] has proposed a serious and credible autonomy plan as a basis of negotiation [...] and it constitutes a new proposal element after years of stalemate."

-French President Nicolas Sarkozy, October 23, 2007

"My conclusion that an independent Western Sahara is not an attainable goal is relevant today because it lies at the root of the current negotiation process.."

- UN Secretary General's Personal Envoy for the Western Sahara Peter Van Walsum, April 21, 2008

Cease-fire declared in the disputed Western Sahara region

Former US Sec. of State James Baker III appointed as UN Special Envoy in the Sahara region

Houston Accord is signed between Morocco and Polisario establishing the implementation of a referendum to decide the future of the Western Sahara

UN Sec. Gen. Kofi Annan presents the Security Council with four options to break the impasse in the Western Sahara: referendum, autonomy, partition, or complete withdrawal

UN Security Council unanimously adopts Resolution 1541, urging the parties to the Western Sahara conflict to "to achieve a just, lasting and mutually acceptable political solution."

Dutch ambassador Peter Van Walsum is confirmed as the new UN Sec. Gen. Special Envoy to the Western Sahara

Morocco releases autonomy under sovereignty plan for the Western Sahara which is endorsed by the United States, Spain and France

Morocco and the Polisario Front conduct first two rounds of negotiations

The Polisario Front threatens a return to armed conflict with Morocco

Third round of negotiations between Morocco and the Polisario Front takes place in January; a fourth round resumes in March

UN Sec. Gen. Special Envoy Van Walsum calls for realism and deems independence an unattainable option. Parties to the negotiations agree to a fifth round of negotiations to take place at a later date.

UN Sec. Gen. appoints seasoned US Diplomat Christopher Ross as the new Special Envoy for the Western Sahara.

U.S. Sec. of State Hillary Rodham Clinton reaffirms U.S. policy in support of Morocco's autonomy initiative.

This information has been produced by the Moroccan American Center for Policy (MACP). MACP is a registered agent of the Government of Morocco. Additional information is available at the Justice Department in Washington, D.C.